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LITHUANIA: ITS DESIRES AND CLAIMS

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Lithuania, a land barely known to most Americans has been the battleground in the Great War between the armies of Germany and of Russia. Its people have endured privations, sufferings and horrors at the hands of the Germans to no less extent than the Belgians. They have rendered no less service to Russia, a government with which they have never been in harmony, than the Belgians have rendered to France. And yet in the midst of the services rendered, this people had its claims, desires and aspirations, individual and distinct from the nation they were serving. They are imbedded in its geography, endeared by its language and developed by its history.

I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF LITHUANIA

In a strict geographical sense, Lithuania lies in the western part of Russia and the eastern part of Germany. It embraces about 125,000 square miles of territory advantageously situate on the Baltic Sea, and forms the border land between the Teutons and the Slavs. The pure Lithuanians number about 3,000,000 people living in Vilna, Kovna, Grodna and Suwalki, governmental districts of Russia, and East Prussia, a governmental district of Germany. In addition thereto a large number of Lithuanians inhabit other parts of Eastern Germany and not less than 800,000 pure representatives of this race live in the United States. In Europe these people mainly inhabit farming districts; in America they are clustered in the cities, in New York, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Chicago, in the anthracite and bituminous coal-fields of Pennsylvania, in the manufacturing sections of New England.

II. THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

The Lithuanian language is closely related to the ancient Latin, Greek and Sanscrit. Sentences from the Sanscrit are in many instances readily understood by Lithuanian peasants. The resemblance to Latin and Greek is marked. In fact, many Latin and Greek words have been taken over almost unaltered. The language stamps itself probably as the oldest modern tongue of the Indo-European family. It differs fundamentally from Polish and Russian which are Slavonic languages. It has rendered considerable assistance to philology and to the migration of peoples, a fact attested by Emmanuel Kant in the introduction to his *Lithuanian Grammar*. It is a beautiful speech, remarkably euphonious and wonderfully expressive. Although lacking in augmentatives, it is extremely rich in endearing and caressing diminutives. These qualities were well noted by Elisee Reclus in *La Geographie Universelle* who concludes his tribute in these words:

If the value of a nation in the whole of humanity were to be measured by the beauty of its language, the Lithuanians should rank first among the inhabitants of Europe.

III. THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA

The brevity of an historical sketch of this people in this article will appear when it is realized that the Lithuanians have been active history-makers for centuries. They trace their ancestry to the ancient peoples of southeastern Europe and Asia-Minor, a fact amply attested by the language itself. Historical data, however, is fragmentary until about the tenth century. In 983 A.D., Vladimir, the Saint, led an invasion into their territory and during the next three centuries the records disclose numerous invasions and depredations by their neighbors, the Russian dukes and the Polish rulers.

During these centuries the Lithuanians were unorganized tribes or clans occupying the regions about the Baltic Sea. On the west they were flanked by the Teutons, on the east by the Muscovites, and on the south by the Tartars.

The numerous invasions and the general hostile attitude of their neighbors made them realize the necessity for organization. Accordingly, they developed communal organizations and developed vigorous leaders. Conspicuous among them are Gedyminas and his grandson, Vytautas. The former extended the realms of his country and founded cities; the latter carried out the work of his grandsire, increased the dominions from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and from the River Bug to the River Oka. He established a chain of fortresses on the southeastern front and became a chief instrument in preventing the Tartar hordes from overrunning Europe. While Vytautas was a wonderful empire builder, he was liberal in governmental affairs and showed himself much in advance of his time by privileges conferred upon the Jews, then a greatly despised race. This period cannot be touched upon without a reference to the nefarious Jagello whose name is one of the most unpopular in Lithuanian history. He came into power in 1382 and married Hedwig of Poland in 1386. At this marriage he promised to deliver Lithuania to Poland and actually established some sort of union. This act caused such great dissatisfaction that he was forced to deliver the government of Lithuania to his cousin Vytautas. This union with Poland still retains a great odium. The great unpopular act of the immortal Vytautas was his consent in 1413 with Jagello then King of Poland to the continuation of this relation.

Almost continuously the history of Lithuania has intertwined undesirably with the history of Poland. In 1659 the political union at Lublin was affected. The nobility of Poland and Lithuania were the consenting parties. They agreed that each country should retain its respective laws, armies, civil and military officials, that the Lithuanian provinces of southern Russia should become a part of Poland, that a dual monarchy very similar to modern Austria-Hungary should be affected. The ever unpopular "Polanization" of Lithuania was instituted. It met with success among the nobles but with disdain among the masses.

The effects of this union upon the two countries are easily discernible. The dual government soon became weak; its military strength dwindled; anarchy arising in Poland crept into Lithuania which repeatedly but unsuccessfully tried to break away. Matters constantly grew worse and in the early 18th century there was little centralized government or power left and the country was practically helpless when an unkind destiny made Frederick ruler of Prussia, Maria-Theresa of Austria, and Catherine of Russia. Hunger for territory on the part of these rulers constituted the motive and the helpless Lithuanian-Polish state furnished the spoils. Consequently we have the three greatest crimes in history, the partitions of Poland and Lithuania in 1772, 1792 and 1795. All took parts of Poland; Prussia and Russia divided Lithuania. Not content, however, with the destruction of Lithuania as a political entity, the usurping governments inaugurated the policy of stifling all national life therein. The Prussianization of German-Lithuania and the Russification of Russian-Lithuania marched hand in hand. The use of the language was forbidden, Lithuanian laws repealed, the native people were deprived of all participation in governmental affairs. These inexorable policies were common to both governments. In Russia additional oppressive measures were enforced. The University of Vilna was removed to Kiev, persecutions were directed against the Lithuanians, insurrections due to harsh treatment of the people arose in 1830 and in 1863, and were suppressed in an unjust, bloody and cruel manner; the people were exiled and the press crushed; Lithuanian type forbidden and Russian characters substituted; and then "the most unkindest cut of all" in 1849, when an ukase replaced the name "Lithuania" by the lifeless geographical appellation of "the North-western Country." By the exercise of brutal and insulting power Lithuania like a convict, was to lose its identity and to be characterized by a symbol. Oppression however, does not always obliterate, nor does force suppress the nationality of a vital people. During the time of these oppressive measures Lithuanian papers printed in Germany

and the United States were secretly distributed to the people of "the Northwestern Country." The spark of national life never dimmed and the uselessness of persisting became apparent to the Russian government in 1904 when it permitted the people to use Lithuanian type.

IV. THE SOLUTION

To most Americans the problem is solved in one of three ways:

1. The reconstruction of Russia into some form of Republic or Confederation with Lithuania constituting a political unit or state thereof.
2. The admission of Lithuania as a political unit or state into Germany or a German Confederation.
3. The formation of a Polish-Lithuanian autonomous state.

To the Lithuanians, however, none of these arrangements will be adequate or satisfactory.

LITHUANIA MUST NOT BE SUBJECT TO OR A PART OF RUSSIA

In Russia the history of Lithuania has always been a record of oppression. Occupying a choice position in the Russian Empire, the key to Russia, any national development was viewed unfavorably. The Russians, themselves, have antagonized this people towards any mingling or fusion with them. The Lithuanians have always differed in their ideas and ideals, in their manners, religion and language. They constitute a more genteel people, steadfastly adhering to the language of their fathers, never adopting any Slavonic tongue. Always free and liberal in religious thought and practice, they have never gone over to the Russian church, never permitting their beliefs to be legislated. While they mainly conform to the Roman Catholic belief we find Lutherans, Calvinists and other Protestant sects among them. The long line of abuse suffered through powers Russian has so prejudiced and embittered this people against ideas, policies, and suggestions emanating from interior Russia, that a reorganized Russian state would not prove harmonious or beneficial to the Lithuanians.

LITHUANIA MUST NOT BE SUBJECT TO OR A PART OF GERMANY

The German-Lithuanians have received better treatment than their Russian brethren, yet no attitude favorable or propitious to a satisfactory union, coalition or annexation to Germany has developed. Although German-Lithuania has been under the domination of Prussia for over a century, the people have never been assimilated. Historical prejudices strong among all vital peoples alone would prevent the Lithuanians from becoming a part of Germany.

In the middle ages the Teutonic Knights continuously invaded and harassed Lithuanian territories and made their name an object of hatred for all times. Prussia ever exploiting weaker nations, did not neglect Lithuanian spoils. The spirit of the great partitions so detestable to Lithuania was Prussianism, so conspicuously manifest today. After the annexation of Lithuania to Germany, the abuse of Lithuanian subjects continued. In fact, a policy inaugurated by Bismarck to exterminate the Lithuanian race in Prussia has never been abandoned. The language is excluded from the schools and in the Protestant churches replaced by German. The governmental authorities have ever been active in the unpopular and fruitless attempt to Germanize the subject-Lithuanian people.

The form of government to which the Germans have been bred is foreign to the typical Lithuanian, who has ever been susceptible to the liberal in government. The character and spirit of this people have always promoted liberality of thought and of government. Even in the middle ages they conferred great privileges upon the Jews with whom they have always lived in harmony. The German government in which the Reichstag—representing the people—has nominal and not real power, does not conform to representative Lithuanian ideas. In Germany this people has continuously maintained its Lithuanian life, has established numerous newspapers promoting that life, has never dissociated itself from its brethren in Russia and in America. They ever maintain an inbred interest in Lithuanian unity and Lithuanian nationality.

LITHUANIA MUST BE DISTINCT FROM POLAND

This statement may seem strange to many Americans who believe that Russia is distressed with but one internal problem, to wit, the problem of Poland. To them all of Russia's historical questions are solved by some sort of Polish autonomy. They lose sight of the differences in these peoples and in their histories. The Polish are a Slavic people; the Lithuanians are not. Originally Poland and Lithuania constituted two distinct states; although united, the union was never popular or beneficial, the people intermingling have never fused, they have never adopted a common language or a common ideal of government. The Poles, when powerful enough to do so, always transgressed Lithuanian rights, and anarchical Poland in its decadence is held responsible for dragging Lithuania through the partitions. In fact, so numerous are the complaints against Poland, that the most ignorant peasant to-day will narrate a long line of abuses to his people handed down orally and from generation to generation. The fundamental differences no less than the historical prejudices of these peoples, are important keys to their desires and claims. These unconditionally demand a separation from the Poles in governmental relations.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER

The history of European states is largely a history of dynasties. As dynasties became powerful they instituted wars through various pretexts upon their weaker neighbors. The motive, concealed or open, was invariably territorial aggrandizement. "Vae Victis" is the slogan of European wars which history had deduced. The victors have ever exercised an imperialistic "Eminent Domain" over the vanquished. This is as true of the conquests of the Romans in their openly avowed wars of annexation, as of the Germans in the Franco-Prussian war when they forcibly and unscrupulously annexed Alsace-Lorraine. It is this same spirit which moved Frederick, Catherine, and Maria-Theresa to effect the criminal partitions of Poland and

Lithuania in the latter eighteenth century. The lessening of this spirit is with Lithuania as with all weak nationalities the basis of her desires and claims. In the solution of this question Lithuania claims the restoration and union of all her territory. The so-called Russian-Lithuania by inheritance and right belongs to the Lithuanian people. This is no less true of Prussian-Lithuania. The persecutions visited upon this people by the countries of which they were forcible subjects have endeared to them more than ever their language, customs, ideals and nationality. In their own country they have indeed, been political exiles. The wrongs suffered by them, the justifiable and general discontent with both political masters, have enhanced the claim of these people to Lithuania as a unit, and demonstrate fully and sufficiently the infeasibility of dominion from or union with foreign and unsympathetic peoples.

With Lithuania situated between two different races both of whom have done her great political wrongs, she must look for her governing power from herself. Eventually the government must be republican in form and in essence. The history of Lithuania prostrate through wrongs suffered from Germany and Russia no less than the character of its people—open, sincere, and liberal—would permit no development of autocratic government. Such a step however, must be taken only with great caution for a sudden change may bring great reaction. In fact the setting up of any form of self government in Lithuania today will present many problems. The country through the great war is poverty stricken, devastated and broken; it has no modern financial or governmental system. Without caution changes may be too radical and revolutionary to be safe and lasting. The establishment of an adequate governmental system is no small task. She must realize that nations like men have their infancy. During this period the protection of a friendly power in the nature of the protectorate of Cuba by the United States should be extended and established, for through her services to civilization Lithuania is entitled to this protection. The ultimate desire of the people is strict independence and self govern-

ment. The Lithuanians cannot work out their social and industrial development unless in this way. Their attitude has ever been towards democracy. Their spirit has ever been liberal; their hatred of autocratic domination is inbred and intense. When the republic of Lithuania is in a position to relieve the friendly power of the burdens of the protectorate, it should as rapidly as possible assume the full burdens of an independent democracy. Even though, nevertheless, it feels and assumes an independent form of government, it claims even then a certain amount of protection from its stronger and more unscrupulous neighbors. It makes such a claim in the interest of justice and of civilization. Without such protection the peace of the world will be menaced through the greed of the powers for spoils. Probably the whole attitude of Lithuania and its immediate desires and claims have been set forth by President Wilson in his memorable address to the Senate of the United States on January 22, 1917:

No peace can last or ought to last which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from potentate to potentate as if they were property. . . . Henceforth inviolable security of life, of worship and of industrial and social development should be guaranteed to all peoples who have lived hitherto under the power of governments devoted to a faith and purpose hostile to their own. . . . I am proposing that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world; that no nation should seek to extend polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own policy, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the great and powerful. . . . I am proposing government by the consent of the governed. . . . These are American principles, American policies. We could stand for no other. . . . They are the principles of mankind and must prevail.

Upon such principles as those promulgated by our great President, Lithuania unmanacled, will soon acquire the power of properly governing itself, and in its choice position on the Baltic, the future is promising and secure.